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SAMUEL SEWALL

The Selling of Joseph
A MEMORIAL

Edited, with Notes & Commentary, by Sidney Kaplan

THE SELLING OF JOSEPH



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BY SIDNEY KAPLAN

The University of Massachusetts Press 1969

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A Memorial 7

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*Forasmuch as Liberty is in real
value next unto Life: None ought
to part with it themselves, or
deprive others of it, but
upon most mature
Consideration.*

The Numerousness of Slaves at this day in the Province, and the Uneasiness of them under their Slavery, hath put many upon thinking whether the Foundation of it be firmly and well laid; so as to sustain the Vast Weight that is built upon it. It is most certain that all Men, as they are the Sons of *Adam*, are Coheirs; and have equal Right unto Liberty, and all other outward Comforts of Life. *GOD hath given the Earth [with all its Commodities] unto the Sons of Adam, Psal 115.16.*
And hath made of One Blood, all Nations of Men, for to dwell on all the face of the Earth, and hath determined the Times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation: That they should seek the Lord. Forasmuch then as we are the Offspring of GOD &c.
Act 17. 26, 27, 29. Now although

the Title given by the last ADAM, doth infinitely better Mens Estates, respecting GOD and themselves; and grants them a most beneficial and inviolable Lease under the Broad Seal of Heaven, who were before only Tenants at Will: Yet through the Indulgence of GOD to our First Parents after the Fall, the outward Estate of all and every of their Children, remains the same, as to one another. So that Originally, and Naturally, there is no such thing as Slavery.

Joseph was rightfully no more a Slave to his Brethren, than they were to him: and they had no more Authority to *Sell* him, than they had to *Slay* him. And if *they* had nothing to do to Sell him; the *Ishmaelites* bargaining with them, and paying down Twenty pieces of Silver, could not make a Title. Neither could *Potiphar* have any better Interest in him than the *Ishmaelites* had. *Gen. 37. 20, 27, 28.* For he that shall in this case plead *Alteration of Property*, seems to

have forfeited a great part of his own claim to Humanity. There is no proportion between Twenty Pieces of Silver, and LIBERTY. The Commodity it self is the Claimer. If *Arabian Gold* be imported in any quantities, most are afraid to meddle with it, though they might have it at easy rates; lest if it should have been wrongfully taken from the Owners, it should kindle a fire to the Consumption of their whole Estate. 'Tis pity there should be more Caution used in buying a Horse, or a little lifeless dust; than there is in purchasing Men and Women: Whenas they are the Offspring of GOD, and their Liberty is,

... *Auro pretiosior Omni.*

And seeing GOD hath said, *He that Stealeth a Man and Selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to Death.* Exod. 21. 16. This Law being of Everlasting Equity, wherein Man Stealing is ranked amongst the most atrocious of Capital Crimes: What louder Cry can

there be made of that Celebrated Warning,

Caveat Emptor!

And all things considered, it would conduce more to the Welfare of the Province, to have White Servants for a Term of Years, than to have Slaves for Life. Few can endure to hear of a Negro's being made free; and indeed they can seldom use their freedom well; yet their continual aspiring after their forbidden Liberty, renders them Unwilling Servants. And there is such a disparity in their Conditions, Colour & Hair, that they can never embody with us, and grow up into orderly Families, to the Peopling of the Land: but still remain in our Body Politick as a kind of extravasat Blood. As many Negro men as there are among us, so many empty places there are in our Train Bands, and the places taken up of Men that might make Husbands for our Daughters. And the Sons and Daughters of *New England*

would become more like *Jacob*, and *Rachel*, if this Slavery were thrust quite out of doors. Moreover it is too well known what Temptations Masters are under, to connive at the Fornication of their Slaves; lest they should be obliged to find them Wives, or pay their Fines. It seems to be practically pleaded that they might be Lawless; 'tis thought much of, that the Law should have Satisfaction for their Thefts, and other Immoralities; by which means, *Holiness to the Lord*, is more rarely engraven upon this sort of Servitude. It is likewise most lamentable to think, how in taking Negros out of *Africa*, and Selling of them here, That which GOD has joyned together men do boldly rend asunder; Men from their Country, Husbands from their Wives, Parents from their Children. How horrible is the Uncleanness, Mortality, if not Murder, that the Ships are guilty of that bring great Crouds of these miserable Men, and Women. Methinks, when we are

bemoaning the barbarous Usage of our Friends and Kinsfolk in *Africa*: it might not be unseasonable to enquire whether we are not culpable in forcing the *Africans* to become Slaves amongst our selves. And it may be a question whether all the Benefit received by *Negro* Slaves, will balance the Accompt of Cash laid out upon them; and for the Redemption of our own enslaved Friends out of *Africa*. Besides all the Persons and Estates that have perished there.

Obj. 1. *These Blackamores are of the Posterity of Cham, and therefore are under the Curse of Slavery.* Gen. 9. 25, 26, 27.

Answ. Of all Offices, one would not begg this; viz. Uncall'd for, to be an Executioner of the Vindictive Wrath of God; the extent and duration of which is to us uncertain. If this ever was a Commission; How do we know but that it is long since out of Date? Many have found it to their Cost, that a Prophetical Denunciation of Judgment

against a Person or People, would not warrant them to inflict that evil. If it would, *Hazaell* might justify himself in all he did against his Master, and the *Israelites*, from 2 Kings 8. 10, 12.

But it is possible that by cursory reading, this Text may have been mistaken. For *Canaan* is the Person Cursed three times over, without the mentioning of *Cham*. Good Expositors suppose the Curse entailed on him, and that this Prophesie was accomplished in the Extirpation of the *Canaanites*, and in the Servitude of the *Gibeonites*. Vide Pareum. Whereas the Blackmores are not descended of *Canaan*, but of *Cush*. Psal. 68. 31. *Princes shall come out of Egypt [Mizraim] Ethiopia [Cush] shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.* Under which Names, all *Africa* may be comprehended; and their Promised Conversion ought to be prayed for. Jer. 13. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin?* This shows that Black Men are the Posterity of *Cush*: Who time out of mind

have been distinguished by their Colour. And for want of the true, *Ovid* assigns a fabulous cause of it.

*Sanguine tum credunt in
corpora summa vocato
Æthiopum populos nigrum
traxisse colorem.*

Metamorph. lib. 2.

Obj. 2. *The Nigers are brought out of a Pagan Country, into places where the Gospel is Preached.*

Answ. Evil must not be done, that good may come of it. The extraordinary and comprehensive Benefit accruing to the Church of God, and to *Joseph* personally, did not rectify his brethrens Sale of him.

Obj. 3. *The Africans have Wars one with another: Our Ships bring lawful Captives taken in those Wars.*

Answ. For ought is known, their Wars are much such as were between *Jacob's* Sons and their Brother *Joseph*. If they be between Town and Town; Provincial, or National: Every War is upon one side Unjust. An Unlawful War can't make lawful Captives. And by Receiving, we

are in danger to promote, and partake in their Barbarous Cruelties. I am sure, if some Gentlemen should go down to the *Brewsters* to take the Air, and Fish: And a stronger party from *Hull* should Surprise them, and Sell them for Slaves to a Ship outward bound: they would think themselves unjustly dealt with; both by Sellers and Buyers. And yet 'tis to be feared, we have no other kind of Title to our *Nigers*. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets. Matt. 7. 12.

Obj. 4. *Abraham had Servants bought with his Money, and born in his House.*

Answ. Until the Circumstances of *Abraham's* purchase be recorded, no Argument can be drawn from it. In the mean time, Charity obliges us to conclude, that He knew it was lawful and good.

It is Observable that the *Israelites* were strictly forbidden the buying, or selling one another

for Slaves. *Levit.* 25. 39, 46.
Jer. 34. 8. . . . 22. And GOD
gaged His Blessing in lieu of any
loss they might conceipt they
suffered thereby. *Deut.* 15. 18.
And since the partition Wall is
broken down, inordinate Self
love should likewise be demolish-
ed. GOD expects that Christians
should be of a more Ingenuous
and benign frame of spirit.
Christians should carry it to all
the World, as the *Israelites* were
to carry it one towards another.
And for men obstinately to per-
sist in holding their Neighbours
and Brethren under the Rigor of
perpetual Bondage, seems to be
no proper way of gaining Assur-
ance that God has given them
Spiritual Freedom. Our Blessed
Saviour has altered the Meas-
ures of the ancient Love-Song,
and set it to a most Excellent
New Tune, which all ought to be
ambitious of Learning. *Matt.* 5.
43, 44. *John* 13. 34. These *Ethio-
pians*, as black as they are; seeing
they are the Sons and Daughters
of the First *Adam*, the Brethren

and Sisters of the Last *ADAM*,
and the Offspring of GOD;
They ought to be treated with a
Respect agreeable.

*Servitus perfecta voluntaria, inter
Christianum & Christianum, ex
parte servi patientis sæpe est licita
quia est necessaria: sed ex parte
domini agentis, & procurando &
exercendo, vix potest esse licita:
quia non convenit regulæ illi gen-
erali: Quæcunque volueritis ut fa-
ciant vobis homines, ita & vos facite
eis.* *Matt.* 7. 12.

*Perfecta servitus pœnæ, non
potest jure locum habere, nisi ex
delicto gravi quod ultimum sup-
plicium aliquo modo meretur:
quia Libertas ex naturali aestima-
tione proxime accedit ad vitam
ipsam, & eidem a multis præferri
solet.*

Ames. Cas. Consc. Lib. 5.
Cap. 23. Thes. 2, 3.
BOSTON of the *Massachusetts*;
Printed by Bartholomew
Green, and John Allen,
June, 24th. 1700.

NOTES

7

The grand opening line, "Forasmuch as *Liberty is in real value next unto Life*," is Sewall's translation of William Ames's Latin, "*quia Libertas ex naturali aestimatione proxime accedit ad vitam ipsam*," cited in the final sentence of the tract, which thus opens and closes with a passage from Ames's *De conscientia, et eius iure, vel casibus*, London, 1623. Dr. William Ames (1576-1633), the celebrated English divine, was "the chief architect of Puritan ecclesiastical theory." Ames fled to Holland in 1610, but died before he could migrate, as he wished, to New England. His books were later brought over by his family and given to the Harvard library. Nathaniel Eaton, first teacher at Harvard, was a student of Ames at the University of Franeker (Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts 1630-1650*, Cambridge, 1933).

8

Genesis 37.20 Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams . . . 27 Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh. And his brethren

were content. 28 Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty *pieces* of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

9

... *Auro pretiosior Omni: ... more precious than All Gold.* This phrase may be Sewall's recollection of *Isaiah 13.12*, in the Vulgate, *Pretiosior erit vir auro*; in the King James version it reads, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold," and was perhaps translated into Latin by Sewall himself. The preceding verse is to the point: "And I will punish the world for *their* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible."

10

Caveat Emptor!: Let the Buyer Beware!

10

extravasat Blood: blood forced out of its proper vessels. Sewall here shows a reservation in his thinking about the Negro: physically, blacks are so different from whites "that they can never embody with us."

12

Genesis 9.25 And he said, Cursed *be* Canaan; a servant of servants shall

he be unto his brethren. 26 And he said, Blessed *be* the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. 27 God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

13

2 Kings 8.10 And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the LORD hath shewed me that he shall surely die . . . 12 And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.

13

Vide Pareum: See Pareus. David Pareus (1548-1635), a well known Protestant theologian of Heidelberg. In his *Diary* for January 1, 1698 Sewall refers to "the Godly Learned ingenious Pareus."

14

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Bk. 2: "It was then, as men think, that the peoples of Ethiopia became black-skinned, since the blood was drawn to the surface of their bodies by the heat." (A passage from the myth of Phaeton.)

¹⁶

*Leviticus 25.39 ¶ And if thy brother
that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor,
and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not
compel him to serve as a bondservant:
... 46 And ye shall take them as an
inheritance for your children after
you, to inherit them for a possession;
they shall be your bondmen for ever:
but over your brethren the children
of Israel, ye shall not rule one over
another with rigour.*

¹⁶

*Jeremiah 34.8 ¶ This is the word
that came unto Jeremiah from the
LORD, after that the king Zedekiah
had made a covenant with all the
people which were at Jerusalem, to
proclaim liberty unto them; 9 That
every man should let his manservant,
and every man his maidservant,
being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess,
go free; that none should serve
himself of them, *to wit*, of a Jew his
brother. 10 Now when all the princes,
and all the people, which had
entered into the covenant, heard that
every one should let his manservant,
and every one his maidservant, go
free, that none should serve themselves
of them any more, then they obeyed,
and let them go. 11 But afterward
they turned, and caused the servants
and the handmaids, whom they had
let go free, to return, and brought*

22

them into subjection for servants and
for handmaids. 12 ¶ Therefore the
word of the LORD came to Jeremiah
from the LORD, saying, 13 Thus saith
the LORD, the God of Israel; I made
a covenant with your fathers in the
day that I brought them forth out of
the land of Egypt, out of the house of
bondmen, saying, 14 At the end of
seven years let ye go every man his
brother an Hebrew, which hath been
sold unto thee; and when he hath
served thee six years, thou shalt let
him go free from thee: but your
fathers hearkened not unto me,
neither inclined their ear. 15 And ye
were now turned, and had done right
in my sight, in proclaiming liberty
every man to his neighbour; and ye
had made a covenant before me in the
house which is called by my name:
16 But ye turned and polluted my
name, and caused every man his
servant, and every man his handmaid,
whom he had set at liberty at their
pleasure, to return, and brought
them into subjection, to be unto you
for servants and for handmaids.
17 Therefore thus saith the LORD;
Ye have not hearkened unto me, in
proclaiming liberty, every one to
his brother, and every man to his
neighbour: behold, I proclaim a
liberty for you, saith the LORD, to
the sword, to the pestilence, and to

23

the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. 18 And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, 19 The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; 20 I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth. 21 And Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which are gone up from you. 22 Behold, I will command, saith the Lord, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire: and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant.

16

Deuteronomy 15.18 It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath

24

been worth a double hired servant *to thee*, in serving thee six years: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.

16

Matthew 5.43 ¶ Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

16

John 13.34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

17

William Ames, *De conscientia, et eius iure, vel casibus*, Bk. 5, Ch. 23, Theses 2, 3: "2.2 Perfect servitude, so it be voluntary, is on the patients part often lawfull betweene Christian and Christian, because indeed it is necessary: but on the Masters part who is the agent, in procuring and exercising the authority, it is scarce lawfull; in respect, it thwarts that generall Canon, *What you would have men doe unto you, even so doe unto them*; *Math. 17.12*. ¶ 3.3. Perfect servitude, by way of punishment, can have no place by right, unlesse for some hainous offence, which might deserve

25

the severest punishment, to wit, death: because our liberty in the naturall account, is the very next thing to life it selfe, yea by many is preferred before it." (translated in *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof*, London, 1643, Bk. 5, 160.) The passage is taken from "The FIFT BOOKE of the DUTIES of MAN Towards his Neighbour."

SAMUEL SEWALL AND THE INIQUITY OF SLAVERY

Samuel Sewall was born in England in 1652, sailed with his family to Boston at the age of nine, and was buried there in 1730. His father, a member of the colonial gentry, sent him to Harvard College where he began a long friendship with the Westfield poet-divine, Edward Taylor, wrote his master's thesis on the question, "Is original sin both sin and punishment?" and tutored his fellow students as resident fellow and keeper of the library. For three years he was manager of the colony's printing press. He married the well-dowried daughter of John Hull, mint-master and richest man of the city, and at various times served the colony as deputy, councilor, diplomat, and finally, after a long career on the bench, as Chief Justice of the Superior Court. Sewall was a friend of Wigglesworth (who did not summon the slaveholder to his *Day of Doom*) and in his own right something of a poet. Throughout his life he labored to prove by scriptural geography that New England was "the Seat of the New-Jerusalem." For more than half a century he wrote down his daily thoughts and practice in a *Diary* which is a cornucopia of American history.

Sewall was a pillar of the orthodox and a wealthy merchant, as broad and narrow of mind as his theocratic peers in the leadership of the New England elect. But two humane and heroic acts set him apart for all time, resurrect him from his grave in the old Granary Burying Ground, and move us to repeat after Whittier, laureate of Abolition,

*Green forever the memory be
Of the Judge of the old Theocracy,
Whom even his errors glorified...
Honor and praise to the Puritan*

Who the halting step of his age outran.
The first of these historic acts was to make public confession, after years of anguish, of his error as judge in condemning to death the alleged witches in the notorious trials at Salem. (On Fast Day, January 1697, Sewall stood up in church as the minister read his declaration of guilt: he was eager, he said, "to take the Blame and shame" of his grievous mistake.) The second, three years later in June 1700, was the writing of *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial*, the first antislavery tract to be printed in New England.¹

Why did Samuel Sewall write *The Selling of Joseph*?

"The Numerousness of Slaves at this day in the Province, and the Uneasiness of them under their

Slavery, hath put many upon thinking whether the Foundation of it be firmly and well laid; so as to sustain the Vast Weight that is built upon it." So reads the second sentence of the *Memorial*. How numerous were the black slaves of Massachusetts in 1700? Eighteen years after the *Mayflower* had landed at Plymouth, the Salem ship *Desire*, on the direction of the colony, transported a coffle of Pequod Indians, with other goods, to Bermuda and in exchange brought back salt, cotton, tobacco—and blacks. Three years later, in its famous, or infamous Body of Liberties, the Puritan theocracy would formulate the first statute to establish slavery in New England. The slave population grew slowly: by 1676, five years after young Sewall had graduated from Harvard, there were perhaps 200 slaves in the colony; it is probable that after Parliament revoked the monopoly of the Royal African Company in 1696, enabling all Englishmen to become slave-traders, the number of blacks in the colony sharply increased. By 1700 the triangular slave voyage was already an institution; in 1708 there were perhaps 400 slaves concentrated in Boston with a white population of about 7,000. By 1720 there would be 2,000 slaves in the colony. As he pondered the "Vast Weight" of the

sin of slavery, Sewall saw the trend.

What of "the Uneasiness" of the slaves? Although Sewall says nothing of it in his *Diary*, an incident of "Uneasiness" at Newbury, where his father lived, which occurred during the spring of 1690, might well have lingered in his memory. As Joshua Coffin, the early historian of slave insurrections, tells us, "This year, Isaac Morrill, a native of New Jersey, came to Newbury, to entice Indians and negroes to leave their masters and go with him, saying that *the English should be cut off, and the negroes should be free...* Their intention was to take a vessel out of the dock at Newbury, and go for Canada and join the French against the English, and come down upon the backside of the country and save none but the negroes and Indians... The persons implicated in this scheme to obtain their inalienable rights, were James, the negro slave of Mr. R. Dole, and Joseph, Indian slave of Mr. Moody. George Major, a Jerseyman, was also implicated." The plan was apparently discovered. What happened to James and Joseph we do not know; Morrill was arrested and sent to Ipswich for trial.²

That black slaves wanted to be free, that (in Sewall's words) "their continual aspiring after their forbidden

Liberty, renders them Unwilling Servants," and that they often acted in protest against their bondage shows clearly even in the fragments that turn up in the court records and newspapers of the time. A survey of the discontent of the black slaves and white servants of the colony over a period of ninety years—from 1629 to 1719—reveals 709 incidents of unruly or runaway behavior. If the period is divided into thirty-year segments, the figures yield more meaning. From 1629 to 1659, of 193 such protests only 7 per cent were by blacks; from 1660 to 1689, of 334 protests 29 per cent were by blacks; from 1690 to 1719, of 182 protests 48 per cent were by blacks.³ It is plain that both the "Numerousness" and the "Uneasiness" of the black slaves of Massachusetts were on the rise as Sewall was being moved to write *The Selling of Joseph*. Moreover, it is probable, as we shall see, that a specific instance of "Uneasiness" was a prime mover in the writing of the *Memorial*.

When did Sewall's interest in the problem of slavery begin? In the pages of his *Diary* during its first quarter-century—he jots down his initial entry in 1673 while a fellow at Harvard—there is little to show that he had given much thought to the plight of

the black man: July 1, 1676 (noting a bloody fray of Philip's War): "Mr. Hezekiah Willet slain by Naragansets... Jethro, his Niger, was then taken: retaken by Capt. Bradford the Thorsday following. He saw the English and ran to them. He related Philip to be sound and well"; September 17, 1685: "News comes to Town of the rising of the Negros at Jamaica"; April 18, 1688: "Jack. alias Jacob Negro, dies at my Unkle Quinsey's by the oversetting of the Cart"; June 8, 1693: "Elisabeth Emerson of Havarill and a Negro Woman were executed after Lecture, for murdering their Infant Children"; April 2, 1694: "Bastian [Negro] and I set seeds of White-Thorn at Saunder's Pasture, north end"; February 15, 1695: "Bastian fetches Sam's Chest from Mr. Perry's."

It is only on the eve of *The Selling of Joseph* that a few hints of feeling for the black as human being creep into the record—April 1, 1699: Mr. Jn^o Wait was here and express'd his earnest desire that Bastian might have Jane, Mr. Thair's Negro. I speake to Jane on Monday"; February 9, 1700: "Will, formerly Capt. Prentices Negro, now living with Maylem, a Horse run away with him, threw him upon the hard frozen Ground, or Timber, near Houchin's

corner, and kill'd him; died in a little while. I saw him panting as came from visiting Capt. Foxcroft. He was much delighted in Horses, and now dies by a Horse. About 1664. he sav'd his Master Prentice from a Bear. Went with Col. Townsend and me to Albany. Rid Post one while."

Yet it would seem that the gross iniquity of slavery had been gnawing at Sewall's conscience during the few years that followed the recantation of his role in the trials of the witches. An entry in the *Diary* five days before *The Selling of Joseph* comes off the press reveals the moment of decision:

Fourth-day, June 19, 1700...
Having been long and much dissatisfied with the Trade of fetching Negros from Guinea; at last I had a strong Inclination to Write something about it; but it wore off. At last reading Bayne, Ephes.⁴ about servants, who mentions Blackamoors; I began to be uneasy that I had so long neglected doing any thing. When I was thus thinking, in came Bro^r Belknap to shew me a Petition he intended to present to the Gen^l Court for the freeing a Negro and his wife, who were unjustly held in Bondage. And there is a Motion by a

Boston Committee to get a Law that all Importers of Negros shall pay 40^s p head, to discourage the bringing of them. And Mr. C. Mather resolves to publish a sheet to exhort Masters to labour their Conversion. Which makes me hope that I was call'd of God to Write this Apology for them; Let his Blessing accompany the same.

Obviously, Sewall was not the only white man in Boston to question the sacredness of slavery; indeed, in *The Selling of Joseph* he observes that "many" had been "thinking whether the Foundation of it be firmly and well laid," and Boston had already instructed its deputies to seek a 40s headtax on imported slaves "to discourage the bringing of them."⁶ But that the "many" were, in fact, an ineffectual minority at the time is clear from the refusal of the Assembly to heed the Boston instructions.⁶ As for Mr. Cotton Mather, his "sheet to exhort Masters to labour" the conversion of their slaves would take him another six years to complete—and even then the main thrust of *The Negro Christianized* would be a plea to the masters that a black Christian would, after all, make a happier slave than a black pagan.⁷

Most interesting in the genesis of *The Selling of Joseph* is the sentence: "When I was thus thinking, in came Bro^r Belknap to shew me a Petition he intended to present to the Gen^l Court for the freeing a Negro and his wife..." About Brother Belknap nothing is known except this glorious note in the *Diary*; his Petition has disappeared from the archives. About the Negro "unjustly held in Bondage" more is known—we may speculate, with some certainty, that he was a slave named Adam, whose hard fight for freedom furnishes a happy glimpse of Sewall in action.⁸

Black Adam was the slave of one John Saffin, who had spent a few years in Virginia, where he sold Negroes, before he settled in Boston as merchant, landowner, slave-trader, deputy, speaker of the House, councilor and judge. In Saffin's reply, a year and a half later, to *The Selling of Joseph*—of which more later—he relates that in March 1694 he hired out Adam to his tenant farmer, one Shepard of Scituate, for a term of seven years,

and knowing the said Negro to be of a proud, insolent and domineering spirit, yet had a cunning serpentine Genius, I thought to work upon his natural Reason; and for his

own benefit (if it were possible) to oblige him to obedience, and to go on chearfully, quietly and industriously in his Business, for the mutual benefit of both Landlord and Tenant; and for his encouragement therein, I promised him his Freedom...

But Adam did not prove to be a cheerful slave for tenant Shepard, who found him "Lazie and Remiss." Although Shepard had given him, as he said, a rich piece of land for his own use and had

also set him at his Table to eat with himself, his Wife & Children, (for which indeed I have blam'd him.) Notwithstanding for all this kindness and indulgence towards this wretched Negro, he grew so intollerably insolent, quarrelsome and outragious, that the Earth could not bear his rudeness... So that his Master *Shepard* long before the Expiration of the Term aforesaid, did earnestly intreat me to take the said Negro away, and otherwise to dispose of him, for he was so proud and surlie that he scarce dare speak to him (as he told me) to ask him where he had been,

or why he staid so long, &c.
much more to strike him, for
fear he should do him or his
Children some mischief...

So Shepard "told me," continues Saffin, "till at last, a year before the said Term was out [on March 25, 1701], I was fain to take the said Negro" from Shepard, renting him "sometimes to one man, and then to another, to work for his Victuals; a while after

I had him to *Boston*, where he had nothing to do but work in the Garden, make Fires and the like, was kindly used, did eat of the same as the English Servants did, yet then he was so quarrelsome and contentious, calling the Maids vile names, and threatnring them (as they said) that they were sometimes afraid to be in the Room with him...

During the spring of 1700, Saffin continually threatened to deny Adam his promised freedom. It was then that Brother Belknap came to his defense in his petition to the General Court and enlisted Sewall in Adam's behalf.

The cause of this militantly uneasy slave—which came to Sewall's attention as he was reading Bayne on "Blackamoors," as he was growing anxious over the fate of the Boston

motion "to discourage" the slave-trade, as he learned of Cotton Mather's plan "to publish a sheet to exhort Masters," brought Sewall to a boil, stirring in him a "strong Inclination to Write something" about his dissatisfaction with "the Trade of fetching Negros from Guinea." This time his intention no longer "wore off"—and he sat down to write, quickly, *The Selling of Joseph*.

That black Adam was very much on Sewall's mind as he opened his Bible and took up his quill may perhaps be seen in his emphasis in the tract on the name of the Adam of the Garden. "It is most certain that all Men, as they are the sons of *Adam*, are Coheirs"—thus begins Sewall's scriptural argument. The passage from Psalms 115.16 (Geneva Bible) that follows is the platform of his antislavery sermon: "God hath given the earth to the sonnes of men." But Sewall carefully alters a word: for "men" he substitutes "Adam," and later on he sees fit to capitalize the name—the only one in the tract given such typographic distinction. GOD, LIBERTY, and ADAM—these alone stand out in the text, boldly linked in capitals. Was the Judge going out of his way to point a prophetic finger at John Saffin's Adam? The closing sentence of the *Memorial*

is clear enough: "These *Ethiopians*, as black as they are; seeing they are the Sons and Daughters of the first *Adam*, the Brethren and Sisters of the Last ADAM, and the Offspring of GOD; They ought to be treated with a Respect agreeable."

Sewall now felt a sense of great urgency. His *Memorial* must be printed quickly so that it might be placed, as soon as possible, in the proper hands—to Paul Dudley, a brother judge, he would later explain that it "was drawn up in haste, that [I] might present [it to] the Council and Assembly."

As for Saffin, *The Selling of Joseph* drove him to a hotter frenzy in his zeal to keep Adam a slave. Legally, Adam was still in bondage. From June 1700 to February 1701 Adam continued to sweat for his master, remaining, no doubt, as "quarrelsome and contentious" as ever, and looking forward to the day when his seven-year term would end and he could claim his freedom. At the beginning of March, a few weeks before that great day, Saffin connived a plan to get Adam out of Boston, away from the neighborhood of Judge Sewall. Once more, Saffin's defense of his racist rights gives us some insight into Adam's "proud and surlie" spirit and Sewall's commitment to his freedom:

I order'd the said Negro to go up to *Bristol*, (where I was going my self) and had agreed with a man of *Swansey* to set him a work, but he absolutely refused and would not go; but after I was gone, he took his Cloaths out of the house by stealth, and went about the Town at his pleasure; which said actions of his at *Boston*, had there been no other, was enough to forfeit his freedom.

Adam, standing on his contract, had in fact liberated himself—and one of his pleasures about the town was to consult with the author of *The Selling of Joseph*. (Had Adam read the tract or listened to it? Had Judge *Sewall* advised him not to be enticed away from *Boston*?) *Saffin* goes on:

So some time after I came home from *Bristol*, this Villain came to me in a sawcy and surly manner, and told me that I must go to Captain *Sewall*, he would speak with me at his House; I guess'd what the matter was, and soon after I obey'd this Negromantick Summons, and went to know what Captain *Sewall* had to say to me... who falling into a discourse about the said Negro, he produced a Writing

he said I had given the Negro under my Hand for his Freedom. When *Saffin* asked *Sewall* to see the "Writting,"

No Sir (said he) 'tis committed to me on trust, why said I, I will give it to you again, &c. Well then, said Captain *Sewall*, you own this to be your Hand: Yes, yes, said I, I shall not deny my hand on any account; upon which he did very gravely admonish me, saying, that since I had given such a thing under my Hand and Seal, I ought to stand to it, and perform it; adding, that Liberty was a thing of great value, even next to life...

Sewall's last words are, of course, an echo from *The Selling of Joseph*.

The history of Adam's further struggle for liberty is one of painful frustration and final victory. *Sewall*, it is clear, never ceased helping him as advisor and judge. As a result of the confrontation in March between *Sewall* and *Saffin*, Adam was ordered to stand trial in May by the Superior Court sitting in *Boston*. (Dick, a free black friend, with Adam in *Sewall's* house, volunteered as surety for Adam's appearance.) Then, in September, another trial by another Superior Court, this time in *Bristol*,

heard Adam's case—in the meantime (howled Saffin) "this Rascally Negro went about the Town swaggering at his pleasure in defiance of me his Master." Between May and September Saffin contrived his appointment as judge of the Superior Court, where, sitting on his own case and refusing to budge, he no doubt influenced the jury to find Adam guilty and still bound. In two *Diary* entries for September, Sewall records Saffin's attempt to pack and bribe the jury: "Peter Walker charg'd Mr. Saffin with urging a man to swear that which he scrupled to swear... Mr. Saffin tampered with Mr. Kent, the Foreman, at Capt. Reynold's, which he deny'd at Osburn's. Conived at his Tenant Smith's being on the Jury, in the case between Himself and Adam, about his Freedom." The verdict was a setback for Sewall, but he managed to convince his fellow judges that Adam should be tried again, a year later, at the next sitting of the court.

It was at this point, during the winter of 1701, in preparation for the trial of Adam the following fall, that Saffin decided to attack Sewall openly in print. The result was a sixteen-page pamphlet, *A Brief and Candid Answer to a late Printed Sheet*, Entituled *The Selling of Joseph*.

Saffin's argument, too devious (and noxious) to detail here, is a tangle of casuistry—the first in a long American line, prototype of the Bible defense of slavery in the era of Calhoun, in which scriptural snippets are manipulated to fortify a theology of white superiority and black bondage.⁹ Its tone and matter are revealed in the doggerel with which Saffin (a poetaster of sorts) sums up his *Candid Answer*:

The Negroes Character
Cowardly and cruel are those
Blacks Innate,
Prone to Revenge, Imp of
inveterate hate,
He that exasperates them,
soon espies
Mischief and Murder in their
very eyes.
Libidinous, Deceitful, False
and Rude,
The spume Issue of Ingratitude.
The Premises consider'd, all
may tell,
How near good Joseph they
are parallel.

As Winthrop Jordan has recently observed, Saffin's pamphlet is the "only forthright defense of slavery in the Continental colonies until the time of the Revolution."

Meanwhile, for black Adam *The Selling of Joseph* was doing its

work. (Sewall never missed a chance to place it where it could do some good—on October 28, 1701 he records in the *Diary* that he has given a copy to William Atwood, the new Judge of the Admiralty: “he thanked me... saying twas an ingenious Discourse.”) Possibly the tract blew some fresh air into the heads of a few of the saints, who, as jurors and judges, were to decide Adam’s fate during the next two years as the case dragged through the courts. On June 1, 1703, when it looked as if Adam had triumphed, Sewall, exasperated by another setback—“Adam is again imprison’d... Trial order’d by the Gen^t Assembly”—put down his anger in verse:

Superanuated Squier, wigg’d
and powder’d with pretence,
Much beguiles the just Assembly
by his lying Impudence.
None being by, his ^{bold} sworn
Attorneys push it on with
might and main

By which means poor simple

Adam sinks to slavery again.
Finally, in November 1703, a jury of
the Superior Court, with a bench of
four judges headed by Sewall, declared
Adam free. Saffin, relentless, again
petitioned the Assembly, but to no
avail. In 1710 Saffin died. A few years
later the name of Adam, a “Free

Negro,” appears in the Boston town records as one of four blacks offering themselves as guarantors for one Madam Leblond, a black woman, to save the town from being chargeable for her “sickness or any disaster.”

Aside from Adam’s cause, that *The Selling of Joseph* had done some antislavery work may be seen in an entry in the Boston selectmen’s records for May 26, 1701, a year after the tract had seen the light: “The Representatives (to the Great and General Court) are further desired To Promote the Encourageing the bringing of white servt^s and to put a Period to negros being Slaves”—a proposal apparently rejected by the Saffin-minded majority of the Court. The failure was not Sewall’s.

One has the feeling that it required an act of great courage for Sewall, despite his high standing in the society, to speak out so boldly for the Christian liberty of the black body as well as for the salvation of the black soul. It is probable that the Mathers did not greet *The Selling of Joseph* with hosannahs. It was one thing to convert slaves, another to free them, still another to believe—foolishly, as Cotton Mather would maintain—that to baptize them was to free them. The flavor of the Mathers’ disapproval may be sensed

indirectly by an entry in the Judge's *Diary*. The background is Sewall's opposition in Council to Increase Mather's plan to live in Boston while he presided over the college in Cambridge. Wrote Sewall in his *Diary* on October 20, 1701: "Opprobrium... Mr. Cotton Mather came to Mr. Wilkins's shop, and there talked very sharply against me as if I had used his father worse than a Neger; spake so loud that people in the street might hear him. Then went and told Sam [Sewall's son], That one pleaded much for Negros, and he had used his father worse than a Negro..." In Wilkins's bookshop a few days later Sewall would rebuke Cotton Mather for "reviling me behind my back," and with a kind of sad irony would record his rejoinder: "I sent Mr. Increase Mather a Hanch of very good Venison; I hope in that I did not treat him as a Negro."

*

Five years after *The Selling of Joseph*, another attack on the blacks of the colony aroused Sewall to act publicly once more. On December 1, 1705 he notes in his *Diary*: "Deputies send in a Bill against fornication, or Marriage of White men with Negros or Indians; with extraordinary penalties... If it be pass'd, I fear twill be an O^rpression provoking to

God, and that which will promote Murders and other Abominations. I have got the Indians out of the Bill, and some mitigation for them [the Negroes] left in it, and the clause about their Masters not denying their Marriage." Four days later the deputies approved "An Act for the Better Preventing of a Spurious and Mixt Issue," the penalties of which were indeed extraordinary, especially for Negroes. For fornication between a black man and a white woman, both were to be whipped, the man sold out of the province, the woman ordered to support her child or be bound out to service. For fornication between a white man and a black woman, again both were to be whipped, the woman sold out of the province, the man fined £5 and ordered to support the child. For performing a marriage between black and white the minister would pay a fine of £50. (One wonders whether Sewall ever reviewed his own backsliding position in *The Selling of Joseph*: "And there is such a disparity in their Conditions, Colour & Hair, that they can never embody with us, and grow up into orderly Families, to the Peopling of the Land: but still remain in our Body Politick as a kind of extravasat Blood.") While Sewall won his point on the exclusion of the Indians from

the act, the addition of his humanitarian clause on the blacks—that “no master shall unreasonably deny marriage to his negro with one of the same nation”—was only a small and perhaps equivocal success.¹⁰

Sewall had meanwhile rushed into print once more in an attempt to stem the racist tide. “It is now Six Years agoe since I printed a Sheet in defence of Liberty,” he would inform the aged Reverend John Higginson of Salem during the following spring. “The next year after, Mr. Saffin sent forth a printed Answer: I forbore troubling the Province with any Reply, untill I saw a very severe Act passing against Indians and Negroes, and then I Reprinted that Question, as I found it stated and answered in the Athenian Oracle...” The answer to the “Question” in the London magazine, *The Athenian Oracle*—“Whether Trading for Negros i. e. carrying them out of their own Country into perpetual Slavery, be in it self Unlawful, and especially contrary to the great Law of CHRISTIANITY?”—is an eloquent re-enforcement of the argument of *The Selling of Joseph*. Sewall brought it out in haste as a four-page pamphlet, titled simply *The Athenian Oracle*, for immediate distribution to members of the General Court as ammunition

against the “severe Act passing against Indians and Negroes.”¹¹ Although it was probably written by an Englishman, it is, in effect, the second antislavery tract to be printed in New England. This time, however, Saffin did not bother with a *Candid Answer*, for there was no need. The *Oracle* had appeared in December; by June, in *The Negro Christianized—A forty-page Essay to Excite and Assist that Good Work, the Instruction of Negro-servants in Christianity*—Cotton Mather was already reassuring the slavekeepers of the province that the word of Christ “wonderfully Dulcifies, and Mollifies, and Moderates the Circumstances” of slavery, transforming the black heathen into “*the Lords Free-man tho' he continues a Slave.*”

The vicious act for “the Better Preventing of a Spurious and Mixt Issue,” which *The Athenian Oracle* had been designed to defeat, had become a law of the Commonwealth despite all that Sewall could do. And the number of black Josephs was still on the rise—in another decade there would be 2,000 slaves in the colony. He had put up a good fight, aiming his jeremiads not only at the Saffins but also at the Mathers and their kind—to Higginson, in the spring of 1716, he would recall “the

Frowns and hard Words" he had suffered since *The Selling of Joseph*. What more could he do? Leafing through his *Diary* and *Letter-Book* for the next quarter-century, we are struck by an occasional entry, a few phrases that make clear enough that the troubles of the black Adams of Massachusetts were never far from his mind:

December 24, 1705: Writ to Gov^r Winthrop [of Connecticut]... enclos'd... Athenian Oracle, Selling Joseph."

August 9, 1711, to Henry Newman of Newfoundland: "Inclosed Sermon Consolations, Selling of Joseph, Extract Athen. Oracle, Mr. Saffin's Answer."

May 6, 1712, to Cotton Mather: "There is one case wherein I would bespeak your compassions; Elisabeth Negro born in Col. Shrimptons house, late Serv^t to Col. Winslow was condemn'd at Plimouth on account of the death of her Bastard Child. She beg'd some Time with Tears; and probably, this may be the last entire day of her riefed [reprieved] time; the next light will shew her dead and buried. I hope she will hear a

Lecture to morrow; Pray that she may hear the Voice of the Son of God, and Live."¹²

July 13, 1714: "I lay a Brick in Mr. Colman's House building near his Meetinghouse: gave Hill the Mason 3"; Cophee call'd him from above. This Cophee tells me he gives Mr. Pemberton £40. for his Time, that he might be with his wife. I gave him 5^s to help him."

December 18, 1714, to Henry Newman (once more): "Inclosd Selling of Joseph, Athenian Oracle, desire him to do somthing if it fall in his way, towards taking away this wicked practice of Slavery. Will be no great progress in Gospellizing till then."

June 22, 1716: "I essay'd... to prevent Indians and Negros being Rated with Horses and Hogs; but could not prevail."

April 5, 1717: "Came home and went to the Funeral of little Mary Bastian." (Her father, a black freeman whose marriage Sewall had facilitated in 1701, worked for him now and then.)

April 24, 1717: "The Court are informed that the said Thorp was dead of a Fall

from's Horse Monday about Sun-set... Mrs. Hedge and her Ethiopian woman were dismissed their Attendance... Thorp was accused by this Negro of Ravishing her... Throop had said, if he were guilty he wish he might never get alive to Plimouth. He was a very debauch'd man... He went Drunk into Court...

Two years later, during the summer of 1719, one Samuel Smith of Sandwich was accused of beating to death his black slave. Justice Addington Davenport, preparing to ride to Plymouth for the trial, had asked Sewall for his "Sentiments" on the case. Sewall's passionate reply echoes the warmest passages of his *Memorial* of 1700:

The poorest Boys and Girls within this Province, such as are of the lowest condition; whether they be English, or Indians, or Ethiopians, They have the same Right to Religion and Life, that the Richest Heirs have.

And they who go about to deprive them of this Right, they attempt the bombarding of HEAVEN: and the Shells they throw, will fall down upon their own heads.

The letter concludes: "I inclose also the Selling of Joseph, and my Extract out of the Athenian Oracle."¹³

The following year, the elderly Judge—he was now almost seventy and had buried two wives—wooing Madam Winthrop, found her changeable and difficult; too often he was sent home unsatisfied, sometimes accompanied, for his safety, by Madam's black slave, Juno. It was Juno, perhaps, who was unwittingly the main stumbling block to a successful courtship. On November 4, 1720 Sewall records in his *Diary*: "She charg'd me with saying, that she must put away Juno, if she came to me: I utterly deny'd it, it never came in my heart [Madam Winthrop knew better]; yet she insisted upon it; saying it came in upon discourse about the Indian woman that obtained her Freedom this Court." Five years before his death, reporting the last days of his beloved servant, the black freeman Scipio,¹⁴ to the Reverend Timothy Woodbridge of Hartford, Sewall bemoans the loss and seeks a new "staff," adding a few words that had informed his life: "I have an Antipathy against Slavery..."

Sidney Kaplan

NOTES

¹

The first in America was the Quaker George Keith's *An Exhortation & Caution to Friends Concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes* (New York, 1693). Unless otherwise noted, the data cited in this essay may be found, *passim*, in the works listed in the Bibliography.

²

A Sketch of the History of Newbury... (Boston, 1845), 153-154.

³

The figures, based on Towner, "A 'Fondness for Freedom'" (214), represent "possible trends."

⁴

Paul Bayne, *An Entire Commentary Upon the Whole Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians...* (London, 1643), Chapter VI, Verse 5. Bayne (died 1617), lecturer at St. Andrew's, Cambridge, was discharged for nonconformity. His works were revered by the New England Puritans. Bayne heads Verse 5, "Servants, be obedient unto them that be your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your hearts, as unto Christ," including "blackamores" as "perpetually put under the power of the master." Thus Sewall was reacting against Bayne and Mather.

⁵

While Sewall probably viewed the

headtax as a weapon against slavery, for others the motive might have been mixed. As Du Bois and Greene point out, Massachusetts ships might still carry slaves to other colonies, while the tax would enrich the treasury from black flesh. Du Bois (31) writes that "the Puritan conscience began to rebel against the growth of actual slavery on New England soil. It was a much less violent wrenching of moral ideas of right and wrong to allow Massachusetts men to carry slaves to South Carolina than to allow cargoes to come into Boston, and become slaves in Massachusetts."

⁶

Two laws of 1703 show a tightening of the slave system: one restrains the manumission of "Mulatto or Negro slaves" by requiring surety of the master against his freed slave's becoming a public charge; the other prohibits Indians and Negro servants or slaves from being on the streets after 9:00 P.M.

⁷

Seven years before *The Selling of Joseph*, during the winter of 1693, Cotton Mather wrote in his *Diary*: "...a company of poor Negroes, of their own Accord, addressed mee, for my Countenance, to a Design which they had, of erecting such a

Meeting for the Welfare of their miserable Nation that were Servants among us. I allowed their Design and went one Evening and pray'd and preach'd (on Ps. 68.31.) with them ['Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God']; and gave them the following Orders. . ." These "Orders" are headed "Rules for the Society of Negroes." Their tenor may be gauged by the seventh Rule: "We will, as we have Opportunity, set our selves to do all the Good we can, to the other *Negro-Servants* in the Town; And if any of them should, at unfit Hours, be *A broad*, much more, if any of them should *Run away* from their Masters, we will afford them *no Shelter*: But we will do what in us lies, that they may be discovered, and punished. And if any of *us*, are found Faulty, in this Matter, they shall be no longer of *us*." (Thomas James Holmes, *Cotton Mather: A Bibliography of His Works* [Cambridge, 1940], III, 935-938). It is not improbable that *The Selling of Joseph* was designed, in part, as a polemic against Cotton Mather's promised "sheet."

A quarter-century earlier, Michael Wigglesworth, in his long poem, *Meat Out of the Eater* (1667), had already counseled the slave to suffer his black

skin and be patient for the sake of his eternal soul. Meditation X is a paraphrase of Psalm 45:13 and *The Song of Solomon* 1:5,6:

The Daughter of the King,
All glorious is within
How Black soever and Sun-Burnt,
May seem her outward Skin.
Because I Blackish am,
Upon me—look not ye
Because that with his Beams the Sun
Hath looked down on me.
A patient suffering Saint
Is a right comely one:
Though black as Kedar's tents, and as
Curtains of Solomon.

8

As against this reconstruction of events, Towner argues that "since there is no evidence that Adam had a wife, and since he did not come to Sewall for help until after the publication of Sewall's pamphlet, there seems to be no original connection between Adam and the pamphlet." ("Sewall-Saffin Dialogue," 41). Goodell (85) and Davis think otherwise. As Davis (344) puts it, "Saffin was having difficulties with Adam by June, 1700, and the Negro may well have had a wife at that time. The delay might have been occasioned by the need for waiting until the seven-year contract with Saffin had expired."

⁹
Saffin did not scruple, in a phrase of innuendo, to hint that Sewall himself owned slaves. See note 14 for a discussion of this question.

¹⁰
As Greene (209) remarks, the legislature perhaps approved Sewall's clause in order "to remove all possible grounds for mixed marriages." This same act laid a headtax of £4 on each imported slave, but allowed a full rebate to the importer upon the exportation of the slave out of Massachusetts. As Du Bois (31) observes, the arrangement turned the harbors of the colony into free ports for slavers. The full rebate was also given to any purchaser whose slave died within six weeks of importation. Sewall nowhere comments on this portion of the act. An anonymous article in the *Boston News-Letter* for June 10, 1706, under the title, "Computation that the Importation of Negroes is not so profitable as that of White Servants," argues meretriciously against the slave-trade. Moore (107-108) speculates that Sewall was perhaps the author.

¹¹
It is possible that Sewall himself had sent the "Question" to the London *Athenian Oracle*. A copy of the

Boston pamphlet at the Massachusetts Historical Society has written above the title: "Capt. Sewall sent the following question over to the Athenian Society." On January 4, 1706 Sewall wrote to Nathanael Byfield of Bristol: ". . . I have now reprinted the Sentiments of the Athenian Society, which I had not seen nor heard of, till I saw it in a Book-Sellers Shop last Fall. . . If the comparing the inclosed with Mr. Saffin's, may help you a little to forget the Severities of the Winter, I shall be gratified;" on April 13, 1706, to the Reverend Higginson of Salem, that he "knew nothing of [it] before last Autumn. . . when I accidentally cast my Eye upon it."

¹²
In March 1714 Cotton Mather printed, as a broadside, his sanctimoniously vicious "Rules for the Society of Negroes" of 1693 (see note 7) with an additional Rule requiring the learning of "the Catechism of the Negro Christianized." On his copy Sewall scribbled: "Left at my house for me, when I was not at home, by, Spaniard Dr. Mather's Negro." (Holmes, III, 935-937).

¹³
Smith pleaded not guilty; he admitted beating Fulin his slave but argued that the beating had not caused his death. The jury apparently accepted

the idea that "the slave died by suffocation having in yielding to his own ungovernable temper, or in sleep subsequent upon it, SWALLOWED HIS TONGUE." The jury then acquitted Smith, charging him five pounds for court fees.

14

A few final words about this black freeman, Scipio, need to be said. It has been alleged that Samuel Sewall owned slaves even as he wrote for their freedom. In his reply to *The Selling of Joseph*, John Saffin at one point asks whether it is really Sewall's opinion that slaveholders "ought in Conscience to set them free, and so lose all the money they cost"—adding, "but it is a question whether it ever was the Gentleman's practice." Towner states that "Sewall probably owned slaves, as is apparent from Saffin's remarks... and from Sewall's *Diary*, index under 'Scipio.'" ("Sewall-Saffin Dialogue," 41)

First, let it be noted that Sewall's first mention of Scipio in the *Diary* occurs on December 15, 1708—seven years after Saffin's reply—and that in the 29 entries, from 1708 to 1725, in which his name appears, there is no evidence that he was Sewall's slave. It is probable that Scipio was a freeman who worked for wages, accompanying the judge on

60

horseback or as a driver of his carriage on his circuit of the courts, carrying letters for him now and then, doing odd jobs for the family (April 12, 1721: "I took Scipio, and measured the Front of Elm Pasture"). Possibly Scipio lived in Sewall's house (May 26, 1720: "I arose [his wife was ill] and lighted a Candle, made Scipio give me a Basin of Water, he was asleep by the fire"; November 27, 1722: "I view the Eclipse in Scipio's Garret, till the Eclipse it self was eclipsed by the Clouds"). It was hardly a slave who was being talked about in the entry of December 8, 1721: "I deliver'd Scipio his Money which he delivered me to keep for him: and gave him Bond to pay him £20. with Interest at 5 per Cent Octob^r 29. 1722." Sewall's final mention of Scipio, on March 30, 1725, records his death of a few months before: "Cousin Samuel Sweet brings his Son Benja. Sweet to me, to dwell with me, and serve me as long as I please... I hope he will prove a Staff to Suport me in my age now Scipio is removed..."

Of another Negro, one Boston, mentioned more than once in Sewall's *Diary* and *Letter-Book* (for the first time more than twelve years after Saffin's reply), Greene (284-285) writes: "Samuel Sewall, upon the

61

death of his Negro, Boston, 'made a good fire, set chairs and gave sack' to those who came to mourn the dead slave"—and in evidence cites Boston's obituary in the *New England Weekly Journal* of February 24, 1729, which opens as follows: "On the 14th died here a Negro Freeman named Boston in an advanced Age; and on the 17th, was very decently Buried. A long Train follow'd him to the Grave, it's said about 150 Blacks, and about 50 Whites, several Magistrates, Ministers, Gentlemen &c." It is on this evidence alone (together with his curious reading of Scipio's lending the Judge money at interest) that Greene (350) lists Sewall as one of the "162 leading slave-holding families in colonial New England."

There is evidence in the *Diary* that the black freeman Boston was Sewall's handyman from time to time (June 6, 1713: "I went on the Roof, and found the Spout . . . stop'd, but could not free it with my Stick. Boston went up . . ."). When Sewall's daughter Hannah died on August 17, 1724, "a noxious Humour flowing from her Legg," Boston, a friend of the family, would "not have her put into the Cellar: so she is only remov'd into the best Room. And because the Casements were opened for Coolness, Boston would watch all night."

Five years later, in February 1729, Boston died and Sewall wrote to a relative in London of "Poor Boston, that was a considerable prop of my declining Cottage. . ." In his *Diary*, on the day of Boston's death, a year before his own, Sewall wrote: "At half an hour after Six a-clock Negro Boston expires. Burying was apointed to be on the last day of the week; but the storm came on so violently, 'twas disapointed, and the second of next week was set. I made a good Fire, set Chairs, and gave Sack."

What then of Saffin's innuendo? There is, in fact, no evidence in *Diary* or *Letter-Book*, before or after *The Selling of Joseph*, that Sewall owned slaves—and much to the contrary.

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Only one copy of *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial* (Boston, 1700) is known to exist; it is in the library of the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston. The tract was reprinted once in the 18th century by the Quaker, Benjamin Lay, in his *All Slave-Keepers That keep the Innocent in Bondage, APOSTATES...* (Philadelphia, 1737) and not again until the Civil War in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1863-1864* (Boston, 1864), 161-165 and in George H. Moore's *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts* (New York, 1866), 83-87.

A slightly incomplete copy (the only one extant) of John Saffin's reply to Sewall, *A Brief and Candid Answer to a late Printed Sheet, Entituled, The Selling of Joseph Whereunto is annexed, A True and Particular Narrative by way of Vindication of the Author's Dealing with and Prosecution of his Negro Man servant for his vile and exorbitant Behaviour towards his Master, and his Tenant Thomas Shepard; which hath been wrongfully Represented to their Pejudice [sic] and Defamation* (Boston, 1701), is in the library of the New-York Historical Society, New York City. This tract has never been reprinted *in toto*; nor has it been

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On the general subject of the Negro in the life and thought of colonial New England, see George H. Moore, *op. cit.*, as well as the controversy over his book in the *Historical Magazine* X, (1866), Supplements, 47-57, 81-2, 105-8, 138-143, 186-198; George W. Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880*, 2 vols. (New York, 1883); W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870* (New

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Although biographies of Sewall have been written by N. H. Chamberlain, *Samuel Sewall and the World He Lived In* (Boston, 1897) and Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Samuel Sewall of Boston* (New York, 1964), he still awaits a full-scale treatment worthy of his stature.